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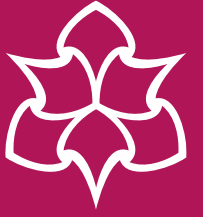
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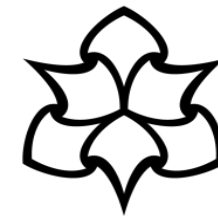
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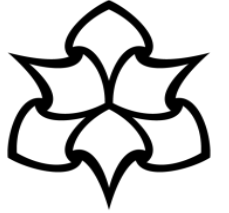
## Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre

# The impact of Covid-19 on Young Workers: a Qualitative Longitudinal Study

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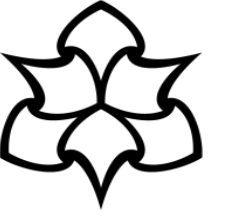


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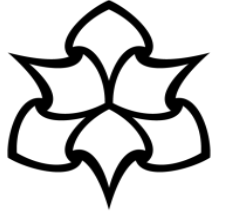


## Theorising work: some ideas which influenced the project

- **Decent Work** – access to work, rights at work, social protection, social dialogue (ILO, 2019)
- **Psychology of Working Theory** - Need for survival and power; social connection and contribution; self-determination (Blustein, 2018)
- **Young workers** - Marginalised, liminal, traditional (Furlong et al, 2018)
- **Lives in limbo** - A continuous present (Bone, 2019); The [im] possibility of planning a future (Cuervo & Cesters, 2019); Waithood and Cruel optimism (Pettit, 2019)



**Covid-19 has amplified  
existing concerns about  
young people and  
precarious work**



## TUC Briefing on Young People and Work (March 2021)

- The number of payrolled employees aged under 25 fell by around 450,000 (12%) between January 2020 and February 2021. **65 per cent of total job losses between January 2020 and February 2021 were among those aged under 25.**
- The **three industries** with the highest job losses (accommodation and food, wholesale and retail, and arts and entertainment) are also those with **the highest percentage of young workers in their workforce.**
- **Over one-fifth (22 per cent) of young workers are furloughed as of 28 February 2021**, higher than any other age group. Vulnerable to changes to the scheme, such as the planned winding down and end of furlough.
- Unemployment rates tend to always be higher for young workers. **The unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds is over 14%**, compared to just under 4% for those over 25.



## Covid-19 – victims, culprits, scapegoats

### 'This pandemic has left me with nothing job wise'

29 September 2020 | Business



"I feel as if this pandemic has truly left me with year old Jack Smith from North East Scotland.

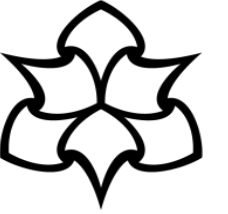


18 Sep 2020

### Fears 'lost generation' unemployment could top a million

By Paul McNamara

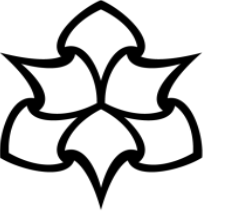
Batsleer and Duggan (2020)



## Covid-19 and Young People; Policy responses

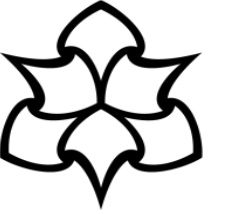
- UK Government - Plan for jobs, Kickstart
- GMCA – seek to involve young people in the recovery – a Youth Guarantee including “managing transitions”
- Recommendations from Youth Employment Group (grouping of relevant organisations) argue for extended support package for young people
- ‘Opportunity Guarantee’ – varying ambitions, lots of ambiguity – depending on who is using the phrase





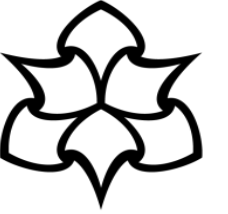
# Our project

What we are doing?



## Research Questions

- What are the personal, social and economic consequences of precarious/insecure work for young people?
- What reasons lead young people to be working in precarious/insecure jobs?
- How do young people reflect upon and make meaning of their experience of precarious/insecure work?
- Are young people finding ways to resist the risks associated with insecure/precarious work?



## **Our project - *Young People and Work in an Age of Uncertainty***



Greater Manchester context



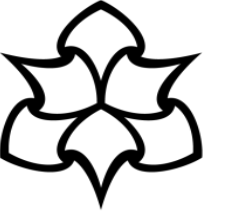
The lived experience of insecure work, not just gig workers. Priority sectors included 'accommodation and food'. 'retail' and 'arts, entertainment and recreation'



Twenty one young people (18-30) to be interviewed twice in 2021. Wave A completed.



Advisory Group to support project – TUC rep, a business owner and academics from Sociology, Youth Studies and Management

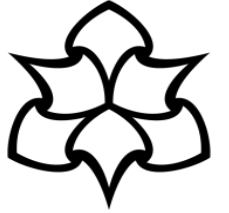


## **Methodological approach**

Longitudinal, qualitative project (Neale, 2018)

Biographical interview methods (Merrill & West, 2009)

Sociocultural, social practice theory 'Figured Worlds'  
(Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998)



# Greater Manchester **YOUNG WORKERS** We want to hear from you



## About the project

Our researchers in the **Centre for Decent Work and Productivity** are conducting research, which seeks to find out more about young people's experiences of work, and in particular, how they make sense of work contexts that are increasingly uncertain.

## Please get in touch if you...

- Are aged 18-30
- Live and work in Greater Manchester
- Work in insecure or precarious employment

We are most interested in those who work in the **"gig economy"** (get work through a platform) **OR** work in a sector that has been **hard-hit by the pandemic**, e.g., hospitality, retail and the arts.



## Contact us



@youngworkersprojectgm



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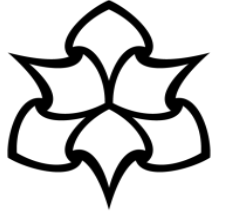


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We put out an open call to young people.

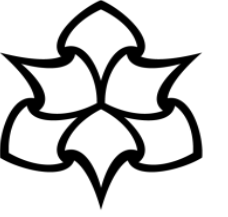
Many but not all came to us via a more personal connection.

£20 shopping voucher per interview for young people (each interview)

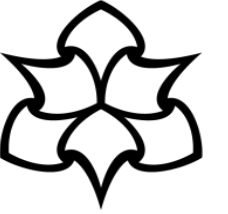


## **Our volunteers - Education and Employment experiences**

- Education status: Graduate (n8), Student (n9), Withdrawn from HE (n2), Never been to uni (n2)
- Employment status: Employed (n14), Unemployed (n4), Self-employed (n2), More than one activity (n1)
- Of those who said they were employed or self-employed: Hospitality (n7), Creative (n4), Retail (n2), Public sector admin (n3), Social care (n1), Science (n1), Delivery (n1), Events (n1).
- Experience of furlough (n10)



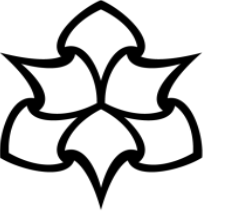
# Early empirical findings



## Consequences: Disrupted dreams and delayed transitions

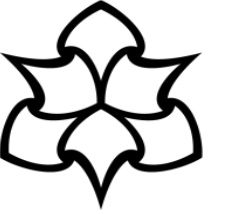
- **Disrupted dreams** – numerous opportunities cancelled/postponed – eg., overseas placements, music gigs, placement at BBC, event organising
- **Delayed transitions** – numerous obliged to return to family home
- **Lives on hold** – reduced confidence in planning for the future, but still having to keep networking and applying for scarce jobs.
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – isolation, anxiety due to changes experienced
- Uncertain lives **reduce ability to be active citizens** – eg., many have done volunteering previously but not able to now





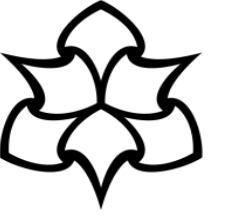
I will say that the pressure that I'm under has forced me to get **mental health** help which is a positive but of course all of these things take so long because of this Tory government underfunding, critically underfunding the NHS... The stress and pressure of not being able to see people as a single person, as a single childless person who doesn't really have much in the way of family, it's been a lot to handle. So it's completely changed my life really, this pandemic and completely changed my work circumstances. Now I'm not really available for any kind of work unless it can be done from home because I can't, I still can't risk my mother's health.

*Cherelle, worked as a care assistant, now unemployed*



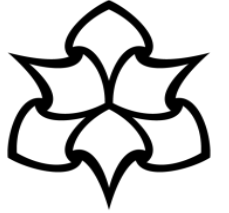
## Why accept insecure work: normalisation of 'indecent' work

- Covid leads to some taking **any job available**
- **Spectre of unemployment** makes them more willing to take 'worse work'
- Creative jobs – this is normal – **not proper work**
- Students doing very **casualised work**, rationalising as temporary
- Evidence of employers opting for **work conditions that give them flexibility** but aren't good for workers, e.g. 'family culture', 'pseudo self-employment'



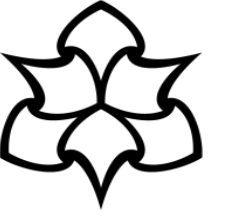
*Family culture* - So it is a bit tricky sometimes because, and we're all, well a lot of us are quite close so the manager will often put it in our hands and say, one of you needs to go home, can you decide who? And you'll be looking at your mate like, well I need the money [LAUGHS].

*Bea, Student doing casual hospitality work*



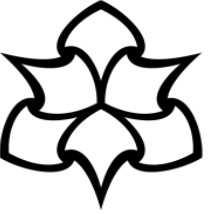
## Making sense of insecure work

- **Neoliberal social imaginary** – faith in own ability to make their way
- Awareness of what decent work *should be* in hoped for future careers. Work that is **decent and dignified and meaningful**.
- **Re-appraisal of values associated with work** both long term, e.g., job security, work-life balance and meaningful work and short term, e.g., awareness of the importance of keyworker roles and industries such as hospitality.
- **Politically critical and aware** but not of initiatives such as Opportunity Guarantee
- Much support of idea of collective action via **Trade Unionism**; some **faith in employers** to do the right thing.



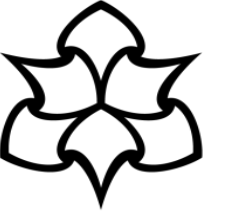
Yeah I think I've weathered the storm quite well but of course I've got the benefit of having my student loan that covers my rent with additional top ups from my family. I've managed to find work quite well.... I've had so many jobs and I always manage to find something new and find something quickly. I really struggle to understand these perspectives from people that say there's nothing out there.

*Adam, Student working for Deliveroo*



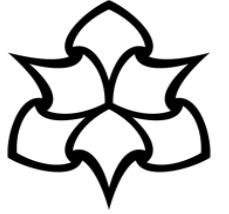
## Scope for resistance: rejecting passivity

- **New opportunities** – eg., creatives making work at home, student starting a politics blog, unexpectedly rewarding work (social care)
- **Improvisation** – e.g., finding a job against the odds, students studying more (due to reduction of PT work). **Optimism against the odds** (aspect of being young)
- **Buffering** – lots of examples of support from family and friends insulating against worst impacts, other factors can also contribute to buffering (sympathetic employer)
- **Managing systems** such as universal credit (**contrasting stories** – some find advisers more sympathetic due to pandemic, while others have negative experience, e.g., being told to pay back benefits owed).
- **Politically opinionated but not generally active.** Ambivalence to political action and disparaging of mainstream politics. Willingness to walk away and challenge poor conditions/employment practices
- Willingness to appreciate role of **safety nets and back-up plans**



And so I think that should be a bit more regulated. I think if you're going to open a business and you're going to take responsibilities for employees, there should be safeguards there to make sure that you actually do look after the welfare of your employees. You have to pass a driving licence test to get a car but you don't have to get a business owner's licence to manage people.

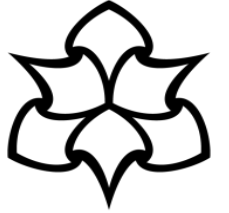
*Khaleel, unemployed photographer*



## **Project in progress – Wave B about to begin**

- Questions will explore how participants circumstances have changed.
- We will pick up on themes from Wave A, e.g., financial impact of pandemic disruption to work, values, mental health, generational differences.
- We will also seek to understand any positives that may have helped them (may be of relevance for public policy implications).





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